810

Paul H. Nitze

Current
Policy
No. 810

The Promise of SDI

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

APR 22 1986

U. S. GOVT. PUBS.
DEPOSITORY 376

Following is an address by Ambassador Paul H. Nitze, Special Adviser to the President and the Secretary of State on Arms Control Matters, before the American Defense Preparedness Association, Washington, D.C., March 18, 1986.

Only 3 years into the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] research program, you have already made impressive advances in your investigations of the technologies that might be useful for strategic defense against ballistic missile attack. Tonight at the Strategic Defense Technical Achievements Awards Dinner, we recognize the technical ingenuity and contributions of research teams and individuals alike who are playing a key role in that innovative research effort. Based on the efforts of its scientific-technical community, the United States has good reason to believe that SDI technologies hold the promise for feasible, survivable, and cost-effective defenses. Should this promise become a reality, the United States will look to defenses to provide a safer and more reliable means of assuring deterrence and global security into the 21st century.

Technology innovation, such as recognized here tonight, reflects the free, open, and competitive American spirit. The achievement of excellence in science and technology, the arts, and in government service has long characterized our efforts as a people. The combined effect of the merits of our foreign policy, as outlined last week by President Reagan in his report to the Congress, and of our technology has made us a leader in the effort to create and sustain a just and secure world order. The work that we are recognizing tonight is one of the foundation stones of that leadership role in the world. The fundamental distinction between our work in the area of strategic defense research and similar work in the Soviet Union, for example, is found both in our historically constructive role in seeking peace and supporting representative institutions throughout the world and in the defensive nature of our military posture and security arrangements.

The Need for SDI

Our need for the SDI research program can be summarized by recalling the origins of the program. The President's March 1983 speech expressed his strongly held belief that we should reexamine the basis of our deterrent posture to see if we could deter aggression through a greater reliance on defense rather than so heavily on the threat of devastating nuclear retaliation. This belief reflects both our disappointment in the deterioration of the strategic balance since the signing of the SALT I [strategic arms limitations talks] agreements and our hope that new defensive technologies can mitigate adverse developments in the area of strategic offensive weaponry.

The United States had proceeded from the assumption that the limitation of defenses in the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty would be the basis for a continuation of negotiations which would lead to significantly reduced offensive weaponry. The theory was simple: if both sides had survivable retaliatory nuclear forces at about the same level of capability and both sides were otherwise defenseless against the nuclear capability of the other, then neither side would have an incentive to strike first, regardless of the circumstances. If one side were to strike first, it could never hope to escape the retaliation of its adversary. Therefore, stable and significant reductions to equal levels of capability would improve the security of both sides.

Instead, the Soviets showed little readiness to agree to measures which would result in meaningful limits or cuts in offensive nuclear forces possible during SALT II. Within the framework of SALT I and SALT II, the Soviets deployed large numbers of MIRVed [multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicle] ballistic missiles of sufficient throw-weight and accuracy to violate the basic premise of the SALT process by posing a real threat to the survivability of the entire land-based portion of U.S. retaliatory forces. The growth in Soviet nuclear capabilities in general, and in the asymmetry in counterforce capabilities in particular, are fundamentally inimical to the security of the United States and its allies.

S1. 71/4:

READEX

In addition, the Soviet Union has continued a robust program of research, development, and deployment of strategic air defense and ballistic missile defense based on current technologies. Some of their work—for example, the Krasnoyarsk radar—is in violation of existing arms control obligations. They also have a vigorous research and development program for defenses against ballistic missiles based on advanced technologies.

Significantly, the Soviets have been engaged for years in research and development efforts examining laser weapons, particle-beam weapons, radio frequency weapons, and kinetic energy weapons for ground-based and space-based strategic defenses. These are some of the same technology areas that you are investigating in the SDI research program and against which the Soviet Union has mounted a massive propaganda campaign. Soviet work in these areas is clearly in applied research and development, not merely in basic research as they would have us believe. The Soviets' ground-based laser at Sary Shagan, for example, could have potential applications for both ballistic missile defense and antisatellite operations.

We should make no mistake about the fact that Soviet offensive and defensive capabilities pose real threats to the security of the West. Our work in SDI is, in large part, a reaction to the unabated growth of this threat, especially during the last 20 years. Through SDI, we seek both new capabilities and a new approach to rectify the deteriorating strategic balance.

Our agreement to the ABM Treaty was based on the understanding that defenses, at the then-existing level of technology, could be overwhelmed by additional offensive systems at less cost than would be required to add balancing defenses. New technologies are now available that could reverse our judgments about the cost-ineffectiveness of strategic defenses. The Homing Overlay Experiment symbolizes new technologies applicable to the area of strategic defenses. Fifteen years ago, an ABM interceptor required a nuclear warhead to destroy an incoming reentry vehicle. Just 2 years ago, the Homing Overlay team demonstrated the capability to destroy an incoming reentry vehicle by precision intercept and direct impact.

If SDI research proves the feasibility of survivable and cost-effective defenses, then the United States will have the opportunity to reexamine guidance for the SDI program. At that time, after consultation with our allies, we will discuss and, as appropriate, negotiate with the Soviet Union any changes in the strategic defense regime in accordance with Articles XIII and XIV of the ABM Treaty. This possibility holds the promise that the strategic balance can be stabilized again in a manner that will preserve Western security with greater confidence into the next century. In addition, the possibility of a successful SDI research phase has played an important role in bringing the Soviet negotiators back to the table in Geneva where we were, and now again are, seeking strategically meaningful reductions in offensive nuclear weapons.

SDI and the Geneva Talks

The United States is fully committed to the SDI research program, which is being carried out in full compliance with the ABM Treaty. In Geneva, at the nuclear and space talks, the United States seeks to discuss the offense-defense relationship and to explore with the Soviets how a cooperative transition toward a more defense-reliant regime could be accomplished, should defensive technologies prove feasible.

There was little substantive movement during the fourth round of negotiations in the Soviet position on defense and space. The Gorbachev proposal of January 15 included no change in their insistence that SDI be banned. The Soviets have, through this last round of negotiations, not addressed the U.S. agenda, preferring instead to advance the self-serving and unacceptable concepts of "space-strike arms" and "purposeful research." They would like to ban U.S. capabilities and research while avoiding constraints on their own weapon systems and research through definitional ploys.

The United States cannot accept the self-serving Soviet definition of "space-strike arms," which includes ground-based systems designed to destroy objects in space and space-based systems designed to destroy targets in space or on earth. This definition calls for a subjective judgment as to the purpose for which a system has been designed. The Soviets have made it clear that they reserve to themselves alone the right to make such judgments. The U.S. position is that an agreement must address specific systems and that limits must be based on evident capabilities, not on subjective judgments of intentions.

The work in Geneva on defense and space issues cannot move forward until the Soviet definition is abandoned. Furthermore, the work on START [strategic arms reduction talks] cannot progress until the Soviets abandon the linkage they have imposed between progress in the START talks and prior U.S. agreement to a ban on "space-strike arms."

The U.S. strategic defense program is fully compatible with the ABM Treaty. The Soviet concept of "purposeful research" is an artificial distinction designed to exploit the fact that the United States openly states the goals of its research and, therefore, that it is "purposeful." The Soviet claim that their research is "fundamental" and has no purpose is not credible. The Soviets merely refuse to acknowledge what we know to be the nature and extensive scope of their own strategic defense activities.

Obstacles created by the Soviets in Geneva will not prevent the United States from continuing its SDI research. We will continue our discussions of the possibilities SDI could offer for eliminating the threat of mutual annihilation. By making our case to the Soviets and to the world, we will challenge the Soviet propaganda campaign which is designed to cast doubts on U.S. intentions. It is important to note in this regard that allied governments support the President's continued dedication to SDI research and U.S. resistance to Soviet efforts in Geneva to ban the SDI research program as a precondition to progress in the offensive nuclear talks.

The Broader Framework of Negotiations

In preparing for the summit last November, the President wished to place arms control issues in the proper perspective. SDI is a part—an important part—of the defense and space area. I have discussed the START issues and the INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces] issues at other times. Together these constitute the nuclear and space talks. But other important arms control issues were also discussed at the summit. The abolition of chemical weapons is being negotiated in the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. The limitation of conventional arms in Europe is being negotiated at the MBFR [mutual and balanced force reductions] talks in Vienna. Confidence-building measures are being discussed in Stockholm under the aegis of the Conference on Disarmament in Europe. In addition, there are a number of issues under discussion which relate to nuclear testing and to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But all the arms control issues together occupied about one-fourth of the agenda at the summit. Also discussed were the full range of other bilateral issues and the important regional issues such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Angola, Nicaragua, and South Yemen. Furthermore, the issues of human rights and terrorism could not be and were not ignored. It was agreed that there would be another meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev in Washington this year and in Moscow during 1987. We suggested June or July or perhaps after the election in November. The Soviets have not replied. We hope there will be a summit and that the dialogue at that level can be continued. But one thing is obvious: that is, that we cannot count on the Soviets to be willing to negotiate an agreement which takes account of our interests and not just theirs.

The lesson is clear. The United States must have a constructive and comprehensive foreign policy. The President's statement to Congress on March 14 sets forth just such a foreign policy. I strongly recommend that everyone read it. I also recommend that you read the full text of Mr. Gorbachev's report at the opening of the Soviet Party Congress on February 26. It took 6 hours to deliver; there are 45,000 words. But the more one reads of these two statements, the clearer will become the essence of what drives the Soviet Communist Party as opposed to what drives the loose coalition of free and democratic countries who are striving to maintain a world in which they are free to develop as they see fit.

Conclusion

We must be prepared to support the freedom of the United States and the interests of such a coalition either through negotiated agreements on arms limitations that truly serve a meaningful peace or, in the absence of such agreements, through our own efforts should the Soviet Union so will it. In either case, peace and deterrence will only be assured through what we do for ourselves. An important part of what we can do for ourselves is represented by your group and, in particular, by individuals such as those we are honoring here tonight.

Without the SDI research program, the best that the United States could hope for is a continuation of the current state of deterrence through primary reliance upon the threat of devastating nuclear retaliation. Asymmetrical Soviet advantages in offensive nuclear forces threaten the stability of this form of deterrence. SDI provides the United States with an opportunity to examine the feasibility of a more stable and reliable form of deterrence which would serve not only American but global security concerns as well. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • March 1986
Editor: Cynthia Saboe • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.

Bureau of Public Affairs
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Official Business

If address is incorrect
please indicate change
Do not cover or destroy
this address label. Mail
change of address to
PA/OAP, Rm. 5815A

Postage and Fees Paid
Department of State
STA-501

U.S. MAIL